



## CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

*CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what they know and deepen their understanding of issues and interest in the ESL field.*

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### **Extensive Reading Activities**

Richard R. Day

#### **Introduction**

English teachers who are interested in having their students reading extensively are faced with a challenge. What do they, as teachers, actually do in the classroom? Simply having the students read for an entire class period strikes many teachers as inappropriate. This fourth and final article on extensive reading discusses activities your students can do after they have finished reading their books.

#### **Why Use Extensive Reading Activities?**

ER activities contribute to student motivation and make student reading a resource for language practice and use in reading, vocabulary learning, listening, speaking and writing. That is, you can use ER activities to help your students improve their oral fluency, writing, and vocabulary, in addition to reading. And equally important, ER activities can also help you monitor and evaluate the reading your students do.

#### **What About Comprehension Questions?**

Avoid asking your students comprehension questions! Remember that one of the goals of extensive reading is enjoyment. Comprehension questions kill enjoyment. Students hate to answer them. They see such questions as a kind of testing. So, beware of death by comprehension questions.

In my experience, I have found that ER activities that allow students to respond on a personal level to their books often work well. This is because they encourage learners to relate what they read to their own world of knowledge and experience.

Think about reading in your first language. When you finish a good book, do you answer comprehension questions? No, of course not. That seems rather foolish. Rather, you often talk about the book with your friends. You might mention how much you enjoyed the writing, the plot, the characters, and so on.

So try to do the same in your classroom. Use ER activities to turn your classroom into a reading community in which your students and you share your excitement and pleasure with the books they and you have read.

#### **What About Book Reports?**

I think that traditional, written book reports are terrible. Perhaps they are not as bad as comprehension questions, but they are awful. Students hate to write them and teachers hate to read them.

However, there are certain types of book reports that can be fun and exciting, for teachers and students alike. Think about oral book reports. For example, there is an activity that is called 4, 3, 2 Technique (Renandya 2004). In pairs, students give an oral report on a book they have



read for four minutes. They can talk about anything they liked (or did not like), the plot, the writing, and so on. Then they change partners and give their reports in three minutes. Finally, everyone changes partners one last time and gives their reports in two minutes. The students really like trying to give the same report in half the time. This activity helps students develop oral fluency.

### **ER Writing Activities**

There is really no limit to the exciting and interesting writing activities that students can do when they have finished reading their books. One that my students particularly like is Gifts (Reiss 2004). Students write about the gifts they would give to four or five of the characters in their book. They explain what they would give them and why. Students like it because they do not have to recall specific details or facts. The activity gives the students an opportunity to show how they have understood the characters, and to demonstrate their comprehension and creativity to other students.

Another enjoyable writing activity is Character by the Letter (Prather 2004). In class, you begin the activity by retelling the story of a book you have read from the point of view of one of the characters. For homework, tell students to choose a character from their reading and be ready to tell the plot of the story as if they are that character. In class, divide the students into pairs. Instruct one of the partners to tell the plot of their reading as if she were the character. Listeners may jot down notes while listening, but may not ask questions. When the first student has finished, have partners switch roles. When both partners have finished, each one writes any questions or comments to their partner's character in the form of a letter (e.g., "Dear Forrest, Thank you for meeting with me today and telling me about your life. What will you do when you finish running across the United States?"). Partners exchange letters. Then, as the character, they respond to the questions in letter form.

### **What About Vocabulary?**

There are a number of vocabulary activities that go well with extensive reading. One of them is The Vocabulary Journal (Day 2004), which can help students expand their existing vocabulary knowledge and acquire new vocabulary. I instruct my students to scan a chapter in a book or the entire book (if it is short) after reading it, choose 5-10 new or unfamiliar words felt to be important, and record them in a vocabulary journal. The vocabulary journal can be done either on a computer or by hand in a notebook. For each entry, students should record all or some of this information:

- the new vocabulary item (a word or a phrase)
- the source (the name of the book, etc.), the page, and the date
- some indication of its meaning (e.g., a gloss, a definition, a synonym)
- the original sentence in which the item appears
- any other information that might be relevant and appropriate

I ask my students to bring their journals (or hard copies) to class every now and then so I can look them over.



## **Conclusion**

Good things happen when students read and read some more. Extensive reading activities that allow students to respond on a personal level to their books encourage students to read and allow them to enjoy what they have read.

I strongly urge you to avoid activities that require students to remember things from their reading or that test them on their reading. Such activities can interfere with students enjoying reading in English. Students, like everyone else, tend to avoid things they don't enjoy! Also, I recommend that you avoid activities that you find boring.

## **References**

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- Renandya, W. (2004). 4, 3, 2 technique. In Bamford, J. and Day, R. R. (Eds.). Extensive reading activities for teaching language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*Please take the time to give us the addresses of anyone else you think might be interested in receiving this newsletter of the CAPE Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk. And don't forget to write us with any comments you might have. Mahalo!*

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